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Children's Work: Experiences of Street-vending Children and Young People in Enugu, Nigeria

Abstract

There is a widespread consensus internationally, demonstrated in the UN Charter on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and subsequent policy documents, that children should be protected from work that is hazardous and harmful. This paper, based on doctoral research conducted with street-vending children and young people in Nigeria, argues that this approach fails to address the complex reality of children's lives in developing countries. Findings from interviews with itinerant child vendors and participant observation in markets in Enugu, Nigeria, demonstrate that vending is an essential part of children's everyday lives, organised alongside, not separate from, other areas of family life. The paper concludes that it is not helpful to impose developed-world ideas on children's lives in such a different context; the focus of attention should, it is proposed, be on finding out what children and young people think and how they might be better supported and protected within their working environments.

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Introduction

Children's work, or 'child labour' as it is sometimes referred to, is a subject that raises considerable anxiety across the world. Article 32 of the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (1989) states that children should be protected from 'economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child's education, or to be harmful to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development'. Nevertheless, estimates produced by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) suggest that there were some 306 million children aged five to seventeen years in employment in the world in 2008, 115 million of whom were engaged in what has been termed 'hazardous work' (Diallo et al., 2010). A range of occupations are defined in the ILO report as hazardous, including industrial work, agriculture and, importantly for this paper, 'street vending and related work' (Diallo et al., 2010, p. 20).

This paper presents findings from a study of children and young people involved in street vending (also known as 'hawking'), in markets in Enugu, Nigeria, conducted for a Ph.D. in Social Work completed in 2009. The paper is co-authored by the student who conducted the study and her Ph.D. supervisor. The paper reviews the main issues raised in the study, making connections with relevant literature and research and drawing conclusions from both. Before doing so, it considers the context in which the study took place, in terms of policy and legislation as well as social, political and economic considerations.

Terminology

The term 'children' and 'child' is used at points in this article to refer to children and young people up to eighteen years of age, in accordance with the ILO definition outlined above and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. However, the specific ages of the children and young people who took part in the Ph.D. study will be detailed when presenting fieldwork findings. All names of children have been changed to protect anonymity.

The policy and legislative context

Concern for children's safety and protection is a global issue that has evoked considerable debate since the passing of the UNCRC in 1989 and the subsequent African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child the following year. Nigeria has signed and ratified both the UNCRC and the African Charter. In 2003, the Federal Government of Nigeria passed the

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Child Rights Act to demonstrate further its commitment towards ensuring the welfare and protection of Nigerian children. The act deals with all issues pertaining to the rights and responsibilities of a child in Nigeria and provides a child justice system for the care and supervision of Nigerian children. Sections 28 and 30 specifically address issues relating to children and work. According to section 28(1), entitled 'Child labour':

- A. No child shall be subjected to any forced or exploitative labour; or
- B. Employed to work in any capacity except where he(she) is employed by a member of the family on light work of an agricultural, horticultural or domestic character; or
- C. Required, in any case, to lift, carry or move anything so heavy as to be likely to adversely affect his (her) physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development; or
- D. Employed as a domestic help outside his (her) own home or family environment.

Section 30(1)C and D of the Act also state that 'A child shall not be used for hawking of goods or services on main city streets, brothels or highways; or for any purpose that deprives the child of the opportunity to attend and remain in school as provided for under the Compulsory, Free Universal Basic Education Act'.

Examining this legislation more closely, a number of important underlying messages emerge. Most crucially, although there is general acceptance that 'forced or exploitative labour' is wrong, child labour is not prohibited as long as it is carried out for a family member and is 'light work'. The hawking of goods or services by children is likewise outlawed, but only in specific settings (i.e. in streets, brothels and highways). Children's work must not, whatever its nature, interfere with the child's ability to make use of schooling, thus again suggesting that paid work by children is possible, as long as it is carried out before and after school. Domestic work for non-family members is also ruled out, giving primacy to the family as the main site for children's care and protection.

Each of these messages carry assumptions that can, at the very least, be questioned. For example, how far can we rely on families (in Nigeria or anywhere else) to provide the safe havens that will safeguard children at work? What is 'light work' and who decides? Is hawking in streets different from hawking anywhere else and, if so, in what way? Should there be restrictions on the amount of time children can spend in work before and after school and, if these limits were to be put in place, how could they be enforced? Finally, how realistic is this legislation in the first place, given the social, cultural and political context in which it

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is located? Critics assert that the Nigerian Child Rights Act is too close to the UNCRC and that it propagates Western values that are 'in conflict with our religious beliefs, culture and tradition' (Vanguard, 2003, p. 27). It may also be argued to have little relevance to the 'real lives' of children and adults who are forced to eke out an existence against all the odds, by working together and 'pooling' family resources. There is, however, another important issue to be considered here. The act has only been signed at present by fifteen states; Enugu (the site of this study) is not one of them. This suggests that, like the UNCRC, it may be more rhetoric than reality in terms of its impact on children in this study.

The social, political and economic context

The Federal Republic of Nigeria is a country of some 140 million people; it is the most populous in the African continent (NPC 2006 census figures). It has thirty-six states plus Abuja, the federal capital territory. It is made up of over 500 ethno-linguistic groups, each with its own distinct dialects and languages, arts and culture, and this diversity has led to much ethnic and religious conflict over the years. Although it has abundant natural deposits of oil and other rich minerals that have placed the country among the top oil-producing countries in the world, Nigeria is ranked by Transparency International as one of the world's most corrupt countries (www.transparency.org). Nigeria also has some of the worst social indicators in the world: one in five children dies before the age of five; twelve million children are not in school; and there are nearly two million AIDS orphans. More than half of the population lives below the poverty line; life expectancy is forty-seven years (National Population Commission and ORC Macro, 2004).

Nigeria has undergone tremendous physical, political, social, economic and cultural changes since its independence from Britain in 1960. Social commentators suggest that these changes have had a major impact on the lifestyles and traditional values of the people, creating what Obinyan (1998, p. 64) has described as an 'uncomfortable fusion between tradition and modernity'. Increased urbanisation, sustained by rural urban migration, has led to failing family ties and relationships, increasing rates of divorce and remarriage and a tendency towards individualism, thus, Obinyan asserts, reducing 'communal considerations for people' (Obinyan, 1998, p. 64). Yet, traditional values remain, with important implications for the place of children in Nigerian society. Although a high premium is placed on children, it is

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elders who hold most respect in society. Akhilomen (2006) argues that the low status accorded to children is essentially an age-based social stratification, which places them in a secondary and disadvantaged position and reinforces their vulnerability. This, he continues: ... explains the disposition of people towards children which makes them regard children as less valuable stakeholders in the society, who can be seen but certainly not to be heard and whose interests can be considered only after those of their elders in the society (Akhilomen, 2006, p. 8).

Research conducted in 2000/01 estimated that there were over fifteen million child workers in Nigeria (Federal Office of Statistics/ILO/SIMPOC, 2002); ten years later, this figure persists, with child labour 'so widespread in Nigeria that it has been accepted by many as part of normal life' (<http://allafrica.com/stories/201008030069.html>). Many of those who are working are engaged in street vending, although it is difficult to give an accurate account of the number of street-working children due to their varying circumstances (Federal Office of Statistics/ILO/SIMPOC, 2002).

The study

Aims and methodology

The study set out to investigate the meanings of work from the perspectives and experiences of children and young people involved in itinerant street vending, placing this in the wider context of their lives at home and at school, their relationships with significant others (parents, peers, siblings and other adults) and their aspirations for the future. A review of literature and research on working children and childhoods and on legislative and policy frameworks was undertaken before four months' fieldwork was carried out in various marketplaces in Enugu, Nigeria.

The methodology used in the fieldwork has been called 'child-centred' (Myers and Boyden, 1998; Woodhead, 1999) and 'subject-oriented' (Liebel, 2004). Both perspectives posit that children are competent individuals who should be respected for who they are and for their contributions and capacity to shape their lives and those of their families and communities. The study used both participant observation and face-to-face interviews in the vending environments. Participant observation made it possible to see what was going on first hand and gain a deeper insight into verbal and non-verbal communications and events (Burgess,

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1991; Hammersley, 1998; Mauthner, 1997). Semi-structured interviews gave research participants the opportunity to contribute their own understandings and express their views freely (Christensen and James, 2000; Esterberg, 2002). Interviews were conducted in a mixture of English and 'pidgin' English, the most common medium of spoken communication, particularly for trade and on the streets. (Where this is used in the presentation of findings, the English translation is given in square brackets.)

Participant observation

There is a widely held view that all social research is a form of participant observation, because it is not possible to study the social world without being part of it (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). However, the term is used more specifically here to refer to fieldwork in which the observer also played a part, in this case, the role of a market-goer and buyer of goods. Participant observation was conducted in various marketplaces during term times when schools were in session, after permission had been negotiated with local union and government officials. Long days were spent in the markets and surrounding streets to find out how many school-aged children came into the market to buy or sell things on weekdays and over the weekends, to find out what time of day children started and finished vending, the length of time they spent trading and what days of the week had more or fewer children in attendance. A 'head count' of the children who were carrying wares on their heads or wheeling them in their barrows into the markets in the early hours of the morning before school (7am—9am) was also attempted, although the many unofficial entrances, exits and short-cut routes made this difficult to achieve. The researcher acted as a buyer and bought wares from children and young people, in return for their time spent in talking to her and answering her questions. In total, sixty-four children and young people aged between six and seventeen years took time to speak to the researcher, as did many adults in the marketplaces, both officials and other sellers, twelve of whom were parents of the child vendors. Everyone was interested to know who the researcher was, where had she come from, what was she doing and why, and what she was going to do with the information she found. This led in a very naturalistic way to discussions about vending, education and life in general.

Interviews

In addition to the more informal conversations that took place with children and adults, twenty-four children and young participants completed a previously designed interview

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schedule to a reasonable extent. Informants were opportunistically recruited and observed through a process of 'random time sampling' (Aptekar and Heinonen, 2003, p. 13), which meant researching people at various times of the day and night, on weekdays and weekends, and in all kinds of weather. This technique not only helped to reduce bias, as Aptekar and Heinonen claim, but also gave deeper insights into children's mode of operation and corroborated their stories about their relationships within the vending community.

Participation was based on availability and willingness (Brewerton and Millward, 2001; Sarantakos, 1998), using a 'snowballing' effect (Atkinson and Flint, 2001). In this way, children and young people spread the word and brought along their vending peers (Arksey and Knight, 1999). Although informants were randomly approached and interviewed on an ad hoc, first-come, first-served basis, the researcher sought to draw from various ethnic groups from the six geo-political zones of the country to ensure representativeness in terms of gender and national spread. The assumption was that their divergent narratives and experiences would not only enrich the data, but would also make it possible to explore the issues around street vending, children's work and the childhoods of child street vendors from different socio-cultural perspectives (Rapley, 2004; Flick, 2002).

Interviews took place in busy, noisy and, at times, chaotic marketplaces where conversations with children were snatched and interrupted at any time, as a child moved off to sell their wares. By being around the markets on a daily basis, it was possible nevertheless to have ongoing and repeated conversations with some children and lengthy conversations with others during quiet spells during the working day (Okoli, 2009). Depending on informants' preferences, interview discussions were either recorded in long hand (note taking) or tape-recorded. Some children and young people requested that the tapes be played back and they were given the opportunity to decide on what information they wanted to keep or delete.

Table 1 sets out the characteristics of the twenty-four children and young vendors as given by the informants themselves, indicating their age, sex, educational level and whom they lived with. (It should be noted that their educational level could not be verified given the methodology used in this study.)

Table 1: Basic Characteristics of Informants

Number	Name	Sex	Age	Education Level	Ethnicity	Lived with
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1	Justina	f	6	NA	Igbo	Mother
2	David	m	7	P2	Hausa	Both parents
3	Nkiru	f	9	P3	Igbo	Maternal aunt
4	Kola	m	9	P3	Yoruba	Both parents
5	Justin	m	9	P2	Hausa	Dad & step mother
6	Chinenye	f	10	P3	Igbo	Maternal aunt
7	Useni	m	11	P5	Hausa	Both parents
8	Gods power	m	11	JS1	Abonema	Both parents
9	Blessing	f	12	P5	Efik	Both parents
10	Christiana	f	12	P6	Jos	Mother only
11	Adamu	m	12	P6	Hausa	Both parents
12	Ud	m	12	JS1	Igbo	Mother
13	Damian	m	13	JS1	Bwari	Both parents
14	Godwin	m	13	JS2	Not known	Elder brother
15	Josephat	m	14	JS3	Igbo	Both parents
16	Grace	f	14	JS1	Not	Both

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					known	parents
17	Paul	m	14	JS1	Not known	Both parents
18	Emeka	m	14	P6	Igbo	Elder brother
19	Nkechi	f	15	JS3	Igbo	Both parents
20	Masiri	f	15	SS2	Igbo	Both parents
21	Eka	f	16	SS2	Ibibio	Both parents
22	Sandra	f	16	SS1	Yoruba	Both parents
23	Chizoba	f	16	SS3	Igbo	Both parents
24	Chinemerem	f	17	SS2	Igbo	Maternal aunt

P = Primary school.

JS = junior secondary.

SS = senior secondary.

Analysis

Data analysis was focused on understanding the children's stories and experiences from their perspectives in order to appreciate their views on the meanings of work as well as their childhoods (Christensen and James, 2000). The interviews were transcribed and analysed to see what themes would emerge, and the rich observations filled in some of the gaps and contributed to the overall developing picture. Four broad topics came to the fore in the data collection; these became the analytical themes that formed the basis of the findings:

- the meanings of work to street-vending children and young people;
- the intersections of meanings of work with family and kinship;
- peer support and friendship as protective factors in the marketplace; and, finally,
- the connections between work and education.

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Findings

The meanings of work to street-vending children and young people

Participant observation demonstrated that large numbers of children and young people were involved in vending in streets and sprawling open market places, both before and after school, at weekends and during holidays. They worked in motor parks, bus terminals and gas stations in major cities, retailing various wares from food and household goods to toys, second-hand clothing, mobile telephones and accessories. Some carried their wares on their heads inside cartons, woven baskets, plastic or metal basins; others sold from wheel barrows. They often operated alongside adult traders, in what, to the external gaze, seemed hard, unpleasant and, at times, scary, as vendors competed with each other for customers and customers abused children verbally and sometimes physically.

Interestingly, in interview, children and young people expressed mixed feelings about work. Some said they perceived vending positively, claiming that 'selling market for road' was fun and afforded them opportunities for play, leisure, education and self-improvement, opportunities to socialise and to get information ahead of others. Sandra (aged sixteen) and Chinemerem (aged seventeen) both said that they enjoyed vending around the motor-parks because the market environment 'is like a cinema', because 'there is always so much going on'. Blessing (aged twelve) agreed, saying 'Video people, people who preach, those who sell medicine, magicians, money doublers—all of them come here. We see many things for here'. Vending was also seen as better and more interesting than its alternative, that is, domestic work. Paul, aged fourteen, had previously been a 'house boy' and now worked in the market. He said 'I like what I am doing! Nobody by-forced me to do it! I came here with my hands and legs. It is what we do for ourselves. I have no problem, my market is moving well'.

But children were not unaware of the hardships and arduous responsibilities that went along with vending in the marketplaces. They knew that their education was affected adversely by their work commitments, and they told stories about how difficult work in the market could be for them. Ud (aged twelve) explained: 'I carry my market everywhere on my head ... the sun is too much ... my whole body pains me, my legs and neck, everywhere.'

Whatever their personal feelings about vending, all the children interviewed were aware that their labours were a necessary contribution to family income. Work was also a duty owed in

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return for their families' love and support. Christiana (aged twelve) expressed this as follows: 'Everybody has something to do! Male or female ... Good children should help their parents do whatever they tell dem [them], even if na [only] to carry gravel.'

Godspower (aged eleven) agreed, saying: 'Good children should always obey their parents and help them to sell market.' Whether they felt they had a choice in this is a moot point. As Useni (aged eleven) said: 'How can you say "no" if your mother asks you to help her in what she is doing?' This leads to the second analytical theme.

The intersections of meanings of work with family and kinship

Observations in the marketplaces (and discussions with parents) made it clear that most children were brought to the markets by their mothers at an early age (aged four years or even younger). Their mothers were market traders and the children watched and helped out as shop assistants, playing with siblings and peers at quiet moments while their mothers sold goods. When they were considered mature and experienced enough to venture out unaccompanied, they were given a small amount of produce of their own to sell. In this way, through a gradual period of socialisation by family members and peers, they developed the knowledge and skills necessary for their trade. Throughout their selling activities, the children maintained close physical contact with their mothers or older siblings, going backwards and forwards during the course of the day, always accounting to their elders who supervised their vending activities and took responsibility for financial management and inventory control.

In interview, the children and young people explained how this informal apprenticeship worked. As Adamu (aged twelve), who sold water for his mother, advised: 'My mama buy the first crate. I finished selling that one and gave her the Money. She buy another one, na so we do am till my money big [we carry on this way until my money increases].'

Most of the children said they did not see street vending in the market as burdensome or exploitative; instead, it was simply understood as their contribution to family life, just like doing domestic chores at home. For those children, work and family life were not separate; they worked at home and worked in the marketplace, just as their seniors and siblings did (fathers also worked, but usually outside the market). But the children also made an important distinction between work that was carried out for a relative (which was not really 'work') and work carried out for a non-family member. Useni (aged eleven) put this vividly: 'How can

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somebody say that I am working because I dey sell market for my mama wey [who] born me? It is not true, Na wa o o! [not at all].'

Children and young people said that they would not expect to be abused or mistreated by a related guardian because of the strong kinship bond they shared. But they felt differently about work carried out for a 'non relative', with the sole intention of generating income or in exchange for care and provision. This could be exploitative, and children reported stories of children treated badly by people who were not related to them. Work carried out at home was also seen as less attractive than vending in the market, because of social isolation and lack of contact with others. This takes us to the third theme.

Peer support and friendship as protective factors in the marketplace

Participant observation showed that children and young people's relationships with peers provided mixed blessings and were, at times, far from cordial. The marketplace was often characterised by fighting and squabbles between children and young people and, sometimes, with adult vendors. But children and young people were able, nonetheless, to form supportive working groups with their peers, particularly with those of the same sex and age as themselves, and they could be seen going around in small groups, selling together. Older child vendors were also visible taking care of younger ones and facilitating their entry into the vending community.

In interview, children and young people said that they supported one another to sell off their goods and meet their daily targets. They also told stories about how they supported each other when they were under attack from rival groups or from unfriendly adults in the market.

Sometimes, they fought back as a group and, at other times, the group was forced to retreat to a safer place. Children said that older siblings came to the aid of their younger siblings in times of difficulty. Josephat (aged fourteen) described having to come to the aid of his young brother one day, when he was bullied by an older boy:

He pushed down my brother's basin, all his market was on the dusty ground. My brother held his clothes and was crying. People told him to say sorry and pick up what he had spilt but he leave am commot [and walked away].

Josephat ran after the boy and fought him, instead of reporting him to adults or the motor-park operators. This tells us something about his self-reliance but also about the low

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expectations he had of help from adults. But how do these children perceive formal education and their future lives?

The connections between work and education

There is a substantial body of evidence that shows that working children in the developing world do not have access to education (Aptekar and Heinonen, 2003; Bourdillon, 2000). The picture emerging from this study is, as ever, more complex than this simple assertion might seem to suggest.

Observation in the marketplaces demonstrated that many vendors attended school. They could be seen changing into and out of their school uniforms, or working on school homework at a quiet moment. Moreover, and perhaps surprisingly, all the school-aged vendors who were interviewed said they attended school and were at various stages of primary and secondary schooling: they worked before and after attending school, as well as on Saturdays and throughout all the school holidays. Blessing (aged twelve) outlined her daily pattern as follows: 'I go home first, remove my school uniform, eat food, do my homework first before I carry my market go sell.'

Both children and their parents said that good-quality education was of great importance to them. This is despite the high costs of education (although schooling is theoretically free, parents have to pay for uniforms, writing and reading materials, even desks and chairs). Some parents reported that they had arranged and paid for private and expensive out-of-school, extra-mural classes for children to help them to pass their examinations, particularly at critical times, such as in the transition from primary to secondary school. Nevertheless, many children lagged behind their expected levels of education. The reasons for this (as might be anticipated) reflect social, economic and cultural pressures. Some said they had developed longstanding patterns of truancy, in some cases, condoned by their parents, who encouraged them to miss school in order to work in the markets or to care for younger siblings at home (again, unsurprisingly, this situation affected girls more than boys). Some families had moved from the countryside to the city in search of work and/or for better educational opportunities for their children, who were then held back for a year at their new schools. In a small number of cases, children had been moved frequently from one relative to another, again causing instability in their education.

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What becomes clear is that street-vending children worked so that they could remain in school; without the extra income from work, they would not have been able to continue at school. Looking to the future, many children and young people said they desired further education and professional careers. Unexpectedly, gender differences shaped their future career choices, with girls tending towards the caring professions (such as teaching and nursing) and to marriage and family life, while boys looked towards business and enterprise. None of the children wanted to remain in street vending for life; neither did they want this as a career for their children. But some of the children said that they did value vending as a step on the road to a possible future career in business.

Discussion

By focusing on the lived experiences and perspectives of children and young people engaged in street vending, this study brings to the fore ideas that challenge the conventional presentation and analysis of child labour as necessarily damaging and abusive (see, e.g. Diallo et al., 2010). It has been demonstrated that children and young people were both ambivalent and realistic about their street work: it was, to a large extent, an inevitable part of their lives, exciting and fun, and also hard and unpleasant. Complex inter-weavings of understandings of work, family and kinship emerged in this study, so that work carried out for family members seemed more of a duty and obligation than a choice, and was viewed as qualitatively different from work carried out for a stranger, an outsider with whom one had no family or kinship ties. Relationships between and amongst children and young vendors, and between them and adult members of the vending community, were also mixed and contradictory. While peers and adults could be a source of support, they were also a source of competition and children and young people had to hold both possibilities in mind if they were to survive the selfish, 'dog-eat-dog' nature of their daily work. All the children and young people valued education and school but, for many, they could not have attended school without the income generated from work, so, again, work and school were inter-connected, not separate parts of their lives. Moreover, children and young people saw the potential value in street trading for their careers in later life.

These findings mirror recent literature that has shown that the 'Western' notion of the ideal childhood, which excludes work, does not always fit the varied childhoods of children in

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developing countries (Bourdillon, 2004; Cree, 2010; Graham, 1999; Punch, 2001a, 2001b). Studies have suggested that street-vending children contribute directly to their families and indirectly to national development but their contributions, like those of women, are often 'unrecognised, under-remunerated, very often relegated to a secondary level, and subordinated to the heads of families' (Bass, 2004, p. 33). Moreover, Liebel argues that children's work offers them a 'legitimate right and an opportunity to play a more active and important part in society' (Liebel, 2004, p. 10). The views and experiences of the children and young people in this study resonate with the social actor model of childhood; their activities and daily manoeuvres to achieve their targets and their economic contributions to the wider community place them not as vulnerable victims or inferior beings, but as 'influential participants' (Vandenbroeck and Bouverne-de Bie, 2006, p. 128) and 'protagonists' of their societies (Liebel, 2004, p. 2). This does not, however, suggest that nothing should be done to support street-working children and young people. Instead, it gives strong pointers as to how this might best be achieved.

Implications for policy and practice

Looking to the future, this research suggests that, rather than seeking to eliminate children's participation in work, ways need to be found to support and contain their working lives. This means looking into the realities of their circumstances and then seeking ways to ameliorate their conditions. This might suggest that vending hours should be regulated in a way that would allow children time to attend school and still be able to assist their parents and guardians with vending and domestic chores. Since not every child has the capacity and resources for secondary and tertiary education, another way forward would be to establish formal and informal apprenticeship schemes. These would have to be backed up by legislation stipulating the terms and conditions, that is, the age and qualification for admission into an apprenticeship scheme. Such initiatives already exist in some African countries (ILO, 2006). To make this happen, multi-agency community-based child welfare organisations and practitioners should engage in meaningful dialogue with state agencies and employment bureaux such as the National Directorate for Employment (NDE) to create job opportunities for child street vendors and other working children.

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Social work, as a profession that aims to enhance people's coping capacity and empower them to achieve better-quality life and well-being (IFSW, 2000), also has an important role to play in addressing the concerns of street-vending children and in minimising their vulnerabilities. This can be achieved in a number of ways. First, social work agencies have a role to play in the development of community partnerships (Twelvetrees, 2002): setting up joint working networks of community-based groups and various child welfare organisations. Multi-agency partnerships with other agencies that are involved with street children and other working children will enable agencies to pull resources to identify, empower and work in concert with voluntary, grassroots, community-based associations in monitoring children within their locale. Social work agencies might also facilitate collaborative relationships between children's groups, government, development agencies and community-based groups and help to evolve ways to promote children's welfare, particularly that of street-vending children. Community development such as this can also play a crucial role in disseminating information about children's rights and welfare, children's education, formal and informal fostering practices and other issues that affect street-working children (Ebigbo, 1999; Ebigbo and Izuora, 1985). In addition, child vendors might be encouraged to organise themselves into recognised children-only trade associations like adult members of the vending community. Their associations can make representations, contribute to deliberations about the marketplace and ensure that children's specific interests and aspirations are taken on board. Through such organisations, children can liaise with existing traders' associations, children's agencies such as UNICEF, non-governmental organisations, faith groups and statutory agencies such as the state ministry for women affairs and social development, to promote their agenda. A starting point might be the setting up of participatory research projects with children and young people who are working as vendors so that they can identify the ways forward for themselves.

Conclusions

Findings from this study show that there is a complex inter-play of issues to be considered in thinking about children and young people's participation in street vending, bringing together family and kinship, social and cultural understandings, and political and economic factors. Whilst the study revealed dangers and problems in street vending, the children and young

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people who took part in this study had developed sufficiently robust coping mechanisms and networks to deal with these. Their stories and experiences of 'selling market' and 'helping' their parents demonstrate the creative and remarkable ways through which they assert their power and agency. What they asked for, fundamentally, was a safe and congenial environment to help them to grow into responsible active citizens of their communities and, at the same time, understanding, respect and appreciation for what they do and protection from abuse. Literature, policy and legislation that emanates from 'Western'/'developed world' viewpoints about child work and working children cannot, and will not, offer sufficient insight into the 'real lives' of working children, as earlier research by Woodhead (1999) has confirmed.

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